

Interviewer: Peer Bode, Co-Directors of the Institute for Electronic Arts.

Camera: Pamela Susan Hawkins, Video Artist.

Sound Engineer: Blithe Riley, Video Artist.

Andrew Deutsch, Video and Sonic Art, Expanded Media, NYSCC, Alfred University.

Dave Jones, Dave Jones Design, formerly Design Lab and Silver Bullet Video.

Jessie Shefrin, Co-Director, Institute for Electronic Arts.

PEER BODE: This is April 1st, 1998. And we're here at Jessie Shefrin's place, to do an interview with Steina Vasulka. This is a tape that we're looking forward to having as part of the video oral history interviews for the Upstate Video History Project. Steina was here three years ago, and we made a wonderful recording and interview at that time.

In way of a first question, which is an issue of understanding something about chronology—and you were just commenting on how I was pushing the dates back and was saying late sixties, when it was in fact early seventies. (Vasulka: Yeah) There's some real importance of trying to establish what the dates were when things actually happened. So maybe you could talk some about this area between 1968 and the early eighties.

VASULKA: I don't know much about '68 or '70 because I wasn't in video. I mean, I started in '69. My video history starts from the time I saw that show in New York on Fifty-Seventh Street at the Howard Wise Gallery, called *Television as a Creative Medium*. I was just audience member. But that was a very important show.

BODE: Who was in that show?

VASULKA: Ira Schneider and Frank Gillette had the *Wipe Cycle* in the show right when you entered. See, the elevator door opened and you stepped into a corridor. This matrix or montage was at the end. You look at it and said, "What's going on there?" You saw the elevator door open and then you stepped out. So it was a wipe cycle. It had this delay, which they did through having the feed reel on one VCR and the takeup reel on another VCR. And one of them recorded and the other one played back. This idea of delayed time nobody had experienced with it yet or very few people had. It was astounding. Because we knew already how to come closer to television; that it was possible to see on the screen exactly what you were doing in front of the camera; but to see it on a delay was just mind blowing.

BODE: Paul Ryan was in that show also.

VASULKA: Yes. Nam June, of course he had *Eat TV Jello*. Eric Siegel had a colorizer tape called *Einstein*. And Juan Downey and Ted Tadlock were in it. But to me, the Siegel piece was the most important because it was a black and white signal coming out in flaming colors. The philosophy, that he could take something black and white and make it into color was absolutely fascinating.

BODE: That was 1971?

VASULKA: No, that was in the summer of '69.

BODE: You said you were a participant, in the sense of being a viewer.

VASULKA: Yeah. I just was an audience member.

BODE: So what was the next stage then for you?

VASULKA: Well, for me, it was that Woody had started working in video. And I was paying very little attention to it; I was being a musician, and he was doing that.

BODE: He was already doing that in '69?

VASULKA: Yeah, '69. That's when a lot of people were starting. Equipment was available. I don't know how Woody found out about it, because I think he knew about it before he saw the *Television as a Creative Medium* show. He was working for somebody that wanted to do an industrial exhibit. He suggested to them that they did it in video instead of film, because of the multiple screens and other things. This was when multiple screens were happening in video as well as in film.

BODE: Expanded Cinema notions?

VASULKA: Yeah, Expanded Cinema notions were there and I started looking at feedbacks and hanging around. It was in our studio.

BODE: What kind of studio was it?

VASULKA: It was a photographer's studio. And he just had all this equipment. Woody caught on, and one other guy caught on. It was the kind of a thing, when you fall in love with a medium and you know that is it. So did I, actually. Unfortunately, our competition for the equipment, died in a motorcycle accident shortly thereafter. So then it was just Woody and I. We started carrying the equipment home, piece by piece. We just lived around the corner. So the PortaPak ended up in our loft. And then the player ended up in our loft. And then the recorder ended up. And then we eventually had everything home. And that was the beginning.

BODE: So that was the beginning, meaning that you then had equipment in your studio. (Vasulka: Yeah) This studio experience that you had seems so key to what you both do.

VASULKA: Yeah, to have it home. The people there couldn't care less. Nobody even missed the equipment not being there, because nobody was using it. So we were lucky.

MAN: This was in New York?

VASULKA: Yeah. We were on Fourteenth Street, the studio was in the lower part of Manhattan. I think Fifth Avenue. Then Woody started going out in '69 with the PortaPak. I think the first time he went out was to Fillmore East to record Jethro Tull, but I'm not sure. And when I saw the Jethro Tull tape, and I said, "This is for me." We started going out regularly with the PortaPak, taping cultural events in the city and things like that, always with the electronic.

BODE: And sneaking it into the Fillmore?

VASULKA: No, not really. There was a photographer who had a press pass, and he took Woody with him. And Woody just went straight up to the sound people and asked them for a feed. And they said, "What for?" (laughter) He said, "Because I'm taping it." "Oh, sure." It was just like that.

BODE: Wow.

VASULKA: And for some reason, the CD(?), (inaudible) CD(?), had the line in(?) and then the AV(?) came out and did not have a line in, only mic in. So those early sound recordings are great. (CHECK ON TAPE)

BODE: Wow.

VASULKA: Yeah. It was amazing. Nobody knew the word, video. "What you do?" "Video." "What's that?" "It's like audio, but images." "What's that?" "It's TV." "Oh." (they laugh) It was kind of a stunted dialogue.

BODE: Mm-hm. So what were your first tapes like that you were making, your first recordings?

VASULKA: Well, we did feedback, which is sort of like just pointing a camera at a monitor on a tripod, a sort of passing through in a way. We immediately took them over to a Buchla synthesizer, putting the video into it, and to get a voltage control. So we were immediately keen on that whole thing and that this was the way we were gonna go. My first recording was with Alfons Schilling(?), if you remember him.

BODE: I do remember him, yeah. A Swiss painter.

VASULKA: And three-D photographer, three-D guy. I remember, we sat in our loft and I started swinging the camera around. When we looked back at it, and they were roaring with laughter, they thought it was so funny. It was the encouragement. I knew I was there. I had arrived. And I think it was the 1st of January in 1970. That's at least my fictional date, first day of a new decade. Steina arrived. She's now a video artist. No violin anymore. (Bode: Laughs) Finished. And that's true. I mean, I packed the violin up and and didn't touch it for years and years.

BODE: And then you made a lot of tapes. Did you feel compelled to show them in terms of thinking about screenings? There were places in New York, like the Anthology Film Archives and I think The Millennium was there too.

VASULKA: See, this is what was interesting. We asked all of them, because we used it as a pretext to meet everybody. We trudged over to Global Village and said, "Hey, we are here. Can we have a show?" We did the same with Raindance and People's Video Theater. But both Raindance and People's Video Theater said, "Absolutely not." We couldn't show, because we were not on the inside, because they had an agenda, they had this special thing, and we wouldn't fit into it. But we became friends, so that's was not a problem. We understood that we couldn't possibly intrude. But Global Village said, "Yes, fine," and we had a show there.

BODE: Were they documentary at that time?

VASULKA: They were always documentary. But they did a very interesting thing there. I think already in '69 they had made a large matrix of monitors. You couldn't edit tape yet. You could cut it with a razor blade but each edit took, like, one minute to settle. So, (laughs) you know, it was that kind of thing they did live. They would set up a few playbacks, and they would start a tape— when they knew that the segment was coming to an end, they started another tape, and switched between them. And now you had

something else going. That's how they ran their shows. And that was quite innovative. It was interesting. Their theater was Global Groove and their matrix was Groove Tube.

(CHECK ON LINE) And Channel One. I never knew if there was a difference or if it was just two names for the same thing. There were two guys, you can read about them in many things. One has a kind of a New York Jewish name (LOOK UP); the other one's name was Chevy Chase. And it took me years and years to figure out that that the Chevy Chase, who was clowning on camera in this Groove Tube, was the Chevy Chase of the *Saturday Night Live*. There was an interview him were he talks about reel-to-reel and CV, and he's really versed. He was there, carrying PortaPaks and everything.

BODE: What were the other groups?

VASULKA: Raindance. People's Video Theater. They were very important in the history.

BODE: So you showed at Global Village?

VASULKA: Yeah, the first show we ever had was in Max's Kansas City steakhouse. And this was a nice place. It was on Eighteenth Street and Fourth Avenue. The whole Andy Warhol crowd would go there, a lot of underground people. The steakhouse was run by Mickey Ruskin. He was a successful businessman and he ran it very unorthodoxly, because we could sign the check, and we would get a bill at the end of the month. A very

clever thing, because I remember when the bill came, I could always somehow pay it. It was great to be able to go any time of day, especially late night, into Max's Kansas City steakhouse and get a good dinner, and not have to worry about paying it till later. Andy did this too. He had a table there with all his tight friends were running around and he paid the bill. One month the bill came, and it was ten-thousand dollars (laughs) and that's when he stopped. But that was Andy, that wasn't Mickey. Mickey was willing to run this kind of thing.

VASULKA : So I remember I went to Mickey because he supported the arts and had done a show with Les Levine and the guy who crushes the cars.

WOMAN: Don Chamberlain?

VASULKA: Yeah. Don Chamberlain was doing something in video. So he had five monitors left over and we talked him into selling three of them to us for a hundred bucks apiece. So the first video equipment we owned was three monitors. We were always doing this thing this way. The first equipment at all that we bought was an audio synthesizer, (inaudible CHECK). So that was our entry into the video, was to buy a puttin(?) and three black and white monitors. Sort of a funny way to do it. But then everything else, we begged, borrowed and stole. And so back to Max's Kansas City.

So Mickey says, "Sure, you can have a show. You can have it upstairs. I'll kick in my two monitors." So we had five monitors. And I said, "So how do we arrange this financially?" "Why don't you do it fifty-fifty?" Or he said, "You can also take everything." I said, "No, we don't do that; we'll do it fifty-fifty." And then we had three nights there of programming. This was in 1970 just nine or ten months after we started, and we already had stuff for three nights. And one night we showed stuff that we had shot of all this character action with the Andy Warhol stars. And they didn't only come, they brought all their friends with them, and half of New York. So it was overstuffed up there. And I remember I went to Miss Mickey, because we had an agreement: "If you show it for free, I don't ask you any money. If you show it for money, I want half." So we said, "We'll show for money." And so I came with half of the money for him. And he said, "All of this? Keep it." Because he made so much on the bar those three nights. (they laugh) But this is a typical example of the generosity that there was in the whole era. It was just there. People weren't thinking money. They were thinking events and that's where we showed first.

And there was a man in the audience, a friend of ours, by the name of Andy Mennick(CHECK sp?). He had seen the show and the audience and everything. And he had, for a long time, dreamt about a theater, that he wanted to have some kind of alternate theater. And he somehow got it into his head that we were his ticket to the theater. So he tells us to come and see him, that he's gonna show us a place in SoHo. And he takes us into this completely run down, horrible place, that used to be a fancy hotel that held bar

mitzvahs and stuff like that. And we climb up on the second floor, and he opens the door into this space, and we knew we had to have it. It was the old kitchen from the bar mitzvah days, full of refrigerators—wooden—and sinks, and pipes on the floor. And we rented a dumpster outside the window, and just dumped it all out there, big iceboxes and everything. Now I would have kept one. I said to Woody, "So what are we gonna call this place?" This place? This is the Kitchen." (they laugh)

BODE: Oh. I wondered how that worked.

VASULKA: So that happened. And at the same time we were fixing it up, they were fixing the other places up. I remember that before they fixed up our floor, there was already one theater downstairs one working. They were running one floor with the Cook's Nest(CHECK?). And on our floor there were still a lot of rats jumping around. It was kind of a semi-scary place. You could fall anywhere through to the ground floor.

They had held a pow-wow there. They found some Indian tribe somewhere. And there was a guy who ran (inaudible CHECK) video program by the name of Sy Griffin(sp? CHECK). He was one hell of a hippie, you know? He was just red-headed and absolutely out of his mind. He decided that this was the place they were gonna have the pow-wow. So they lit, of course, a big fire (laughs) in the middle of it, and sang all night. (laughs) But this is before we opened. (they laugh) Everything went well. And eventually, there were six theaters there, of all sizes, and a big bar. And the bar was the saving grace of the

place, especially for us, because sometimes the performances were so lame that people just couldn't stand it. So they wouldn't leave to go home, (Bode: They'd just go drink) they left to go to the bar. Takka Iimura gave one of those deadly performances that goes on forever and nothing changes. And everybody came, because everybody loves Takka. "Oh, Takka's gonna have a show!" And so one by one, everybody left.

BODE: It's like watching someone play chess or something in slow motion, right?

VASULKA: Yeah, yeah. So in the end, we all left and he was alone in the room. But we were all in the bar. Finally, Takka comes out into the bar, and we gave him a standing ovation. (they laugh) But again, we just jumped on the place, and said, "We want it. And we'll fix it." We never thought about the money. Then an envelope comes and says, "Well, how about the money?" By that time, we had applied for money to the New York State Council, and had gotten eight-thousand dollars. So we said to him, "How's eight-thousand dollars?" "Perfect. Perfect rent." So there it went. And so we had the place, then, worry-free for a year. We could do anything we wanted to; rent was paid for.

BODE: And was this the whole eight studios, or eight spaces?

VASULKA: No, this was just the Kitchen.

BODE: The Kitchen, which was one space within this whole building of other theaters.

And was that the Mercer Arts Center?

VASULKA: That was the Mercer Arts Center. You see it as the Mercer Arts Center; we saw it as this hole in the ground when we first came there. There was a bar on the other side, on the Broadway side, called Atrium Spa(? CHECK). You don't remember it?

BODE: No, I was too young for bars then.

VASULKA: Adrian's(? CHECK) was also a hangout. And it was crowded there, and the owners really wanted more space. Greed, greed, greed. So they kept taking out the building support beams.

BODE: Oh. No kidding. Really?

VASULKA: Yeah, so they could fit another table in there.

BODE: Incredible.

VASULKA: And one day, the building collapsed. It imploded. (they laugh) And it just came down.

MAN: All because they pulled these out? That's not a good idea.

VASULKA: No, it's not a good idea. Fortunately, it made a few cracks and movements before it came tumbling down, so most people got out. There was only one guy who died in it. But that's how that place ended, see? (Bode: Mm-hm, I had heard that) The physical space.

BODE: When was this, then in terms of chronology?

VASULKA: We got the space in 1970. It just took a couple of months to fix it up, throw out the iceboxes and so forth. And by very early spring, '71, we had the Kitchen, and we opened it the middle of June. There was a big party, and nobody understood what it was, and we said, "This is the opening. This is your place. Everybody can come and do everything." And Shirley Clark didn't understand what was going on.

BODE: Filmmaker, documentary filmmaker...

VASULKA: Yeah. But she was at that time doing video. And she says, "Is this for real?" And then she said, "Can I suggest something?" I said "Yeah." "Why don't you make an open night once a week, that anybody can come and show anything?" And we absolutely took her up on it. So Wednesdays, the whole time we ran the Kitchen was open night, for people to come and show work. It became this kind of a notorious deadline, because

everybody always had to finish their tape before eight o'clock on Wednesdays. They would come running down with the tapes in hand, shaking—not having even looked at it yet. There is an incredible charge in new work—how ever bad it may turn out later. To see work for the first time, it just has a magic. It was always a very interesting night. And when nobody showed up, then we would show our stuff. We would always have a backup, you know, because we were churning out tapes every week. So if there was a slack, we just took it up.

BODE: And again, there was an audience there that would come to see it?

VASULKA: Oh, yes. Nam June would come a lot, because he lived very close. See, he also lived on Mercer Street just a hundred numbers up. He would come in these sort shoes that were kind of slippers. He would come like he had just woken up with this big thing around his belly, and unkempt hair. He would just come and sit down. Somebody would put up a tape, and he would immediately go asleep. Then he would wake up just before the end of the tape, walk up to this young budding video art and say, "Young man, you have genius." I just thought, you haven't even seen anything! (they laugh)

BODE: What would happen the other nights, that weren't the Wednesday night open night?

VASULKLA: Well, we got ourselves a music curator. It was the first guy on the staff. And when we met him, he was sixteen years old. He was our liaison to the Buchla synthesizer. He was a student of Mort Subotnik's. And he was this young, shy guy, and a very talented person. His name was Rhys Chatam (CHECK). He was seventeen years old when he became the first audio curator of the Kitchen. You're talking about video curators like David Ross. Because he was so shy we kept saying, "Rhys, you have to bring in some people here." And he said, "Me? How can I do that?" And we said, "Rhys, you know, you have played all your music. This is third Monday, and it's just you and lowly speaker. You have to do something more than that." We said "Just call Lamont Young." The reason we wanted Lamont was that we had seen his *Standing Waves* piece. It was in a big auditorium, I think at NYU. We went and there were people lying on the floor, sitting on the floor cross-legged, they were in the windows, everywhere. It was so thick with smoke that you could cut it. People sat and they were rowing back and forth. And we walked in between. And every time you moved your head the sound changed, because they were standing waves. I think the concert was for five hours; we lasted maybe three. I think it's interesting that I walked out of one of the most significant events of my life. I walked out because enough was enough. It was the moment to leave. And it taught me a lot about time, because it was a non-starting, non-ending event. I think he started the oscillators long before people could enter the room, you know? It had no beginning, no end. So we asked Rhys to get this guy. At the time he was quite famous. I mean, he had gotten the DIA grant and he was a star. He didn't think he should do something for free. And he said to Rhys, in order to get out something out of it, he said,

"I will make it a preview of my new LP." So the posters went out and everything went out. He was gonna have... And Marion Sazela(sp? CHECK) showed her slides, and he previewed his LP. And we absolutely packed the house, completely. After that, every musician in Manhattan knew that this place was there. And after— it just kicked off. First, every Monday, and then Mondays and Tuesdays. We thought that there were a lot of other concert programs all over New York. But we didn't realize they had all died, and that we were the only place. So instead of being arrogant, as we should have been, we were so grateful. We said, "So lucky we are that these people want to use the Kitchen, and that they come here with this great music, and that we get to meet them."

We also got a reviewer, which we were grateful for. We got the *Village Voice* to review it. And shortly thereafter, we also got reviewed in the *New York Times*. And we always thought about this as a very lucky thing. Many years later, we read that one of these guys, Tom Johnson, who was just starting at *Village Voice*, didn't have anything to review, until the Kitchen started. There were no concerts going on. So after the Kitchen opened he reviewed the work every week. And the same with the other guy, John Rockwell, who had come from somewhere in the Midwest, and had just been hired by the *New York Times*. Rockwell made his career on those concerts. But we always thought it was the opposite, that we couldn't offer those people any fee or anything; but at least they got the review in a major paper, you know?

MAN: Were there other kinds of performances in the early days, besides the music?

VASULKA: Yeah. Let's see, I told what happened on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday nights, right? So there are four days left. Walter Wright and Jane Wright, who was his wife then, they just showed up. He was this kind of precocious Canadian kid, who was working on the Scanimate, that famous synthesizer. He was interested in performances. I think he had a lot to do with that we got into the performances. He was by no means the first or the only. Walter was working with People's Video Theater at that time. He wanted to perform video and audio. So in the beginning, we might easily have been the first ones to do performances with audio and video. You know, drifting images and taking people in the audience and having them drift and things like that. But we had no stamina to keep doing it, and not that much interest, and all these other people took it over. And they usually brought their own equipment. They wheeled in synthesizers and boxes and cameras, and everything that was being used. And these were basically jam sessions. Bell Labs got interested. I don't know. That was, again, actually, through us, because—through (inaudible CHECK ON TAPE), 'cause he was going up to Bell Labs. And we invited them to have a concert. And again, you see, we thought we were so grateful that they would come. We said, "There are Bell Labs people coming!" But it was the opposite. They said, "We have an opportunity to show our stuff in Manhattan!" Again they brought their audio and video equipment with them. These were the early computer films too by Ken Knowlton, Lillian Schwartz, Manny (Emanual) Ghent... (LOOK UP ON LINE)

BODE: The Whitney brothers?

VASULKA: They never came.

BODE: You're talking about those people actually coming to the Kitchen.

VASULKA: Yes. And out of that we eventually made a festival called *Computer Festival*. And unfortunately, it ran only twice, because after we left the Kitchen, nobody was interested in doing them.

BODE: When would that have been, the Computer Festival?

VASULKA: The first Computer Festival was in '72 or '73. And then there was one more held outside the Kitchen at NYU, I think. They wanted to do it annually. But the new director of the Kitchen, who came in after us, wasn't interested in that. He didn't believe in it. He threw out basically everything that was computer and video. But that would have been amazingly early on, if it had become an annual festival it would now be the longest running yearly digital event.

BODE: The Avant Garde Festival was happening during that time. (Vasulka: Yeah.) Also The New York Avant Garde Festival, with Charlotte Moorman and Nam June (Paik) was going too.

VASULKA: Yeah, we participated in two of those. I guess 1970 and '71. When we had the Kitchen, we didn't have time for it. But Charlotte performed also at the Kitchen, of course with Nam June several times.

BODE: In terms of equipment how did that evolve? What kind of equipment was used? Where did it come from?

VASULKA: Equipment basically belonged to Woody and I, personally. And then people brought in their own too. I picked up on Mickey's philosophy. I said, "Show for free, get the space for free; show for money, and split it with us." But then I modified it right away and said, "Show for money, and do whatever you want to," because that's the way Mickey had done it for us. It was interesting that almost everybody gave us the money. There was nobody who took the whole box, even if they deserved it, because we printed the posters for them and provided space. The Kitchen was run out of our pockets. It was our money. And when there was some investment we got it all back by all the grants and events. That's how it was run. We got a lot of money back into our pockets if there was a good show. I am just remembering that Nam was the only one who wanted money. But he was as poor as anybody. It was such a funny situation. I said, "Nam, here's your money." And he said, "No!" We said, "Well, take at least half of it." There was twenty bucks, I think, altogether. "Take ten." He said, "Well, I took a cab to get here." And Charlotta says, "Nam, don't even dream of taking money from these wonderful people!" "No, I shouldn't," says Nam, "I shouldn't. Here, take it all." I said, "No. It's your money.

You should take it." We were all, of course, laughing, because it was so funny. He was, you know, a poor man from a poor country; he really held onto his money. But in the end, he gave it to us. Nam was a contributor to the Kitchen in many ways.

MAN: Did Tony Conrad show films there?

VASULKA: Yeah. It was the first time we met. He came in as a composer. And he had a film. He said, "Do you have a projector?" And of course, we had one at home, because Woody is also a filmmaker. We brought down the projector. He showed something called *The Articulation of Boolean Algebra*. And he explained it to us.

BODE: Which was an early flicker film.

VASULKA: Yeah. Yeah, he also showed other flicker films that were all black and white. He explained it, like Tony does. We didn't understand it, but we liked him very, very much. So when Woody couldn't teach, because he hated teaching so much, he talked Jerry into splitting the line, so he would teach only half-time. And we got Tony in on the other half. So that's how Tony came into Buffalo.

BODE: Chronology-wise, you're jumping forward.

VASULKA: I'm jumping way fast, because we met Tony probably in '71 or at the latest, '72. And then we were in Buffalo in '75, having an opportunity to bring somebody in on Woody's line. Tony was at Antioch at that time.

BODE: Paul Sharits had been at Antioch, right?

VASULKA: Yeah, yeah. Tony had taken Sharits' place. And then he also came to Buffalo.

BODE: Just one other question about the Kitchen. So the rent was paid for by the New York State Council on the Arts?

VASULKA: Yeah.

BODE: And was that just one year, or from year to year?

VASULKA: Ok. So the first year, it was actually our personal NYSCA grant that we donated as rent. The next year we got the money through a group called Perception. And who was Perception? It was Woody, Eric Siegel and I.

BODE: That was your organization?

VASULKA: Yeah. You had to be an organization or you couldn't get money from New York State Council on the Arts. Howard Wise suggested to Eric—Howard didn't know us—that he should find some worthy people, and become a group. So Eric came to us and said, "Let's be a group. (laughs) And let's call ourselves the Perception." We had just met Eric; we didn't know him well then. But we were as impressed with him as he was with us. We were in the same boat. We were the people who understood the tools, the importance of the signal, and we talked the same language of tool making and tool building. So we got money as Perception. The next year, we told Howard that we should really get money as the Kitchen. The Kitchen became a sub-project of Electronic Arts Intermix. See, Electronic Art Intermix was the umbrella; and under it we were the Kitchen, Perception and the third one was, I think, what became the Tape Library.

BODE: It was part of Intermix.

VASULKA: Perception, the next year, was Eric, Juan Downey, Beryl Korot, Ira Schneider, Frank Gillette...

BODE: Oh, really? And they were also involved in other group. They were Raindance.

VASULKA: I never understood why they didn't apply as Raindance. I think they wanted the prestige Howard had. He could get the money.

BODE: Had he been a curator?

VASULKA: No, he was a rich man. He had earned money on camouflage paint. He was the inventor of camouflage paint.

BODE: (laughter) Oh, I did not know that. And he was a collector of kinetic art. Was that his jump to video?

VASULKA: No, you're jumping and I'm jumping. See, what's funny is he was in Cleveland. He becomes a rich man. He was very careful and very conservative, I thought, and an old man. But instead of doing what a careful conservative old man should do, he starts collecting technological art, and opening up a gallery—first in Cleveland. Then he moved to New York. And because he never sold anything—there was not much of a chance that you would sell, let's say, a light sculpture—he bought it. He would always buy from every artist at least one artwork. The last show he did at his Howard Wise Gallery was this *Television as a Creative Medium*. And then he was burned out. He realized that he could lose endless money on it, and that it wasn't what he wanted to do. Then he started losing money on Electronic Arts Intermix, because that was also a big money hole, and he never got anything back. But we understood that that's what he wanted to do.

BODE: What happens before the point that you go to Buffalo? Can you say something about the period and transition and how you ended up in Buffalo?

VASULKA: Well, we just ended in Buffalo because there was a funny program in there that Jerry O'Grady, who worked in UB's English department, brought students to New York City. They were the sightseeings. Are they still going on?

BODE: No, they've cancelled them fairly recently, maybe five years ago. Was it called Studio in X New York? Art departments participated, and I don't know, maybe there was an English program, as well. (Vasulka: I think there was.) So it really tapped into the different academic programs.

VASULKA: Yeah, Jerry must've tapped into something. He did one of those studio visits with us. And for us, it was a great blessing because, we just sat home and all these people came in, and we did what we always did, with all these people who came in. But these people paid money for it, unlike everybody else who was got it for free. We had a lot of people visiting, all the time. We would tape somebody, and they would want to see it. For instance when we taped Jimi Hendrix, half of New York wanted to see the tapes. They were always coming in. So here came O'Grady, a strange, strange guy, like a priest or monk or something, remember?

BODE: Mm-hm.

VASULKA: He comes with his group of students. After the presentation, he said, "I have to get you up to Buffalo." And we said, "Yes, yes. Take us up to Buffalo, it's fine," you know? Like: No way. But he persisted. And finally, he said we would go up there for twelve weeks to teach something at Media Study. And these twelve weeks turned out to be six years before we knew it. (laughs)

MAN: When was that first twelve-weeks teaching?

VASULKA: That was the fall of '73.

WOMAN: And did you give up your place in New York then, or did you keep it?

VASULKA: No, that was the great thing. We didn't have to give it up. It was a beautiful loft, and we got a painter to pay the rent, which was all of two-hundred dollars. He could paint there all day. He would go home at eight o'clock, and so we could come there and crash any time we wanted to. We had that situation going for a few years. That was very good, because we never intended to leave the city. We just loved New York, both of us. But, you know, once you are out of New York, you're out.

MAN: When did you step away from the Kitchen?

VASULKA: When we went to Buffalo.

MAN: At the same time?

VASULKA: Yeah. But we would have stepped out of the Kitchen anyhow, because you don't want to run a place like that too long; it takes too much time and energy. And it was fully capable of running without us by then. The second year, we weren't that involved, because there were so many other people who wanted to be involved.

MAN: Didn't you spend some time over in Europe also, at about that time, before you went to Buffalo?

VASULKA: In the summer we traveled in Europe. We must've been invited. The trick is we gave everybody tapes who wanted them. Out they went, so we got a lot of invitations to France forever after. And the French think we are much more famous than we are, because of those early tapes. This was one of the greatest investments (laughs) we ever did, because I like France, to Paris. We didn't do this in Germany, and lo and behold, we are totally unknown there. So that's the way to do it. Leave your card everywhere.

MAN: When you got to Buffalo, when did you start building tools? Or were you building tools all along?

VASULKA: All along. The tool building came almost as soon as we were doing video because the tools were so primitive, you know? And there was nothing off the shelf. There was nothing you could buy in a store. So we went into tool building right away. The audio synthesizer; that first thing we bought as a tool, was gotten in order to distort images. It was the only off the shelf thing we could find. It was the reason that I taught the summer school in Buffalo. I was gonna get paid five-thousand dollars. And that was the price of the synthesizer. So it was totally clear; I would teach, we would get the tool.

MAN: And this was teaching high school kids.

VASULKA: No. It was university students.

MAN: I guess that transformed to being high school later?

VASULKA: Yeah, later. One of the students that showed up there was Arnold Braglad(?) CHECK). It was a great blessing. He saved my life. I was so scared of teaching; I'd never done anything like that. And he showed up—shy, strange guy, very talented. And Terry Gross was there. And now I've rediscovered her. She runs a program called *Fresh Air* on the radio. It goes on at six o'clock every night. She's great on the air, and she was great in class.

MAN: You mentioned before about buying an audio synthesizer and then using that to distort images. How did the audio synthesizer distort the images technically?

VASULKA: We bought the audio synthesizer because we had used the Buchla at NYU, through Rhys Chatham. But we didn't really have access to it, and we knew we had to get our own. So when we bought the audio synthesizer, we bought it with the idea of feeding video signals in for audio tracks.

MAN: Feeding the video into the audio synthesizer?

VASULKA: Yeah, yeah, as a control voltage. If you have heard any of our early tapes, they're all full of that. Then we put the audio synthesizer directly into the video connector on the monitor, and if you get sixty cycles you get half of it white and half of it black and—end of story, right? What was nice about the putneys(?) CHECK, that they were later called synthies, was that they had very high frequency oscillators, way above the audible spectrum. Who knows why? So you could go way up in the frequency, dividing it twice, three times, four times, or multiplying, I guess you'd say. I mean, you multiplied as far as the audio could go; but the device was green, right?

BODE: Right.

VASULKA: So this was our introduction, actually, to how television works.

BODE: You were patching into an SEG or something like that?

VASULKA: Basically we pointed the camera at the monitor.

BODE: Oh, I see. So it was just you displaying it on the monitor and V scanning.

VASULKA: Yeah, V scanning. Now, right from the beginning, we were purists, in a sense; we thought that the signal should be pure and there shouldn't be any camera involved, and that it was bad to be using cameras and input; it should all be synthesized, you know? That's kind of a fantasy we had. In reality, you can't really do that much, you know.

BODE: And then by the time you left Buffalo, you had built a very complicated digital image processing system with Jeffrey Shire(sp? CHECK). (Vasulka: Yeah) Right? And a little bit before that, you had done things with George Brown?

VASULKA: Yeah, we worked with him mostly while we were living in New York. The George Brown period was sort of 1970 to '74, mixed in with a little Eric Siegel. Then comes '74, in the summer, we bought the Rutt/Etra. And that was the beginning of our divorce, you know, artistically, because I wasn't half as interested in the Rutt/Etra as Woody was. And he was on it all the time anyhow. So I started going out and mounting

my camera to the car and driving to make. We also were using a lot of tools, and not building any. And then this crazy student of ours came along and starts suggesting that he can do this and he can do that. "Good, you do that. You wanna build us a filter? Sure, build us a filter." And, you know, "Oh, you think you can do that?" And Jeffrey would say, "I can build a jamblock(?CHECK)." "Build us a jamblock," and Woody would say, "I'll give you a good grade." This kid came from the engineering department. And he was funky and crazy, and played the violin. He had long hair that stuck out on both sides, and nothing on the top. He was barely twenty then. When he built this tools they were good. The guy really understood what he was doing. We got very interested in a design that we had gotten from Binghamton. At that time, we dreamt about this great communication with Binghamton and Ralph.

DIGRESSES HERE COULD REMOVE A BUG CHUNK ABOUT DAVID MORE THAN STEINA

The idea was to work with a guy there named Don MacArthur.

JONES: Don and I had built an A to D converter for video that was sixteen shades of gray. And while Don and I were playing with it and talking about it, we thought we could make a time base corrector for video. He said he had a great idea of how to make an eight bit video rate A to D converter. And he sat down and started working on it. It never could go fast enough to do video at really fast rates. But it looked great at the slow rates, because it made a lot of columns in the image and each little scan line within the columns

had constant shades of gray, so it was, like, holding the images and—or holding the shade of gray for a number of pixels. It was this kind of digitizer with stripes.

VASULKA: So it didn't hold the full image in?

MAN: No, it didn't hold the image at all. It only held the image for a fraction of one scanline. It was basically just an A to D converter.

VASULKA: Yeah, but it made those beautiful funky squares.

MAN: Yeah. Well, they were more streaks. (Vasulka: Yeah) It had a defined width that you could adjust; but they were one scanline high. It gave it very fine definition vertically, and very coarse definition horizontally. (Vasulka: Yeah) And it made very nice images. But originally it was supposed to be an A to D converter for a time base corrector we were designing. And it worked out more as an art machine, as a byproduct, because it never quite did what he invented it to do.

MAN: What was his background? He was an electronics person? Isn't he a mathematician?

MAN: He was.

VASULKA: I'll come back to Jeffrey; let's follow this for a while. Why did he hang around the center? Was he out of work then?

MAN: No, a friend of his was a student of Ralph's. (Vasulka: Yeah?) And he brought him along one day to a show that was at the TV Center, and started hanging out. The student was hanging out with us, spending a lot of time there.

MAN: No, wasn't he teaching at Cortland College?

MAN: Yeah.

MAN: He would come down and visit. He stopped teaching there, and spent a lot more time in Binghamton, and then eventually got a job at Singer, working downtown.

VASULKA: So what did he teach you?

MAN: I don't know. Mistakes are good? (laughs)

VASULKA: Now, eventually... You have to give him a bit of credit for your A to D?

MAN: No, the A to D and the line storage stuff that I did was before that. That was something that he saw that I had done, and his ideas started springing out of that. The

frame buffer that I did that held the 64 by 64 frame came after that, but it wasn't based on anything that he did.

VASULKA: I see. I thought there had been a connection.

MAN: The connection was that we were gonna design this time base corrector and he was gonna design the first part, which was the A to D, and I was gonna do the memory part to store the image, because I had already done a line buffer. I made this device that made squares out of the image. And it looked sort of like a frame buffer, but it was not held—it only held one scanline, and then repeated it, and then held another scanline and repeated it.

MAN: Spatial and(?CHECK) intensity digitizer.

MAN: I don't think we actually met until till Ralph's house in Binghamton.

VASULKA: We knew about it because of Kit Fitzgerald and Jack Moore(sp? CHECK). We met them in Amsterdam, and also in Paris, because they were working for Sony in Paris.

MAN: Right. He was doing store windows for Sony.

VASULKA: Ok, so you were just legendary, but you were not a real person until Binghamton. (laughs) That's interesting. So anyhow, Don was very (inaudible CHECK) because we had decided to go in with the Experimental Television Center. And everything we developed, they were there; and everything they developed, we were there. And to that extent, we bought an LSI-11. It was late '75 or early '76. To have a computer home, in your home environment in '76 was pretty hip. They also bought an LSI-11. And that was the end of the collaboration. They could never get theirs to work.

???????????? DID THEY GET THE LSI TO WORK OR NOT?

And of course, we didn't get (wouldn't have gotten?) ours to work either, if it hadn't been for Jeffrey. It was important to get the register and then assign them. It was an octal system. And it was really heavy. The keyboard was a teletype. Every time you pushed a key or were writing in those addresses, it would make noises. It had to be booted up with a with a tape ribbon.

MAN: Was that one with the little flippers?

VASULKA: No.

MAN: But this was keyboard and ribbon.

VASULKA: Yeah. There's a paper ribbon with the boot on it. It was seven rows across, in various configurations. We glued it together and then it hung there as a loop. And every time the computer went down—it would start up in the morning—it just went through the loop and stopped, and waited for the next day. It was kind of funny but that's how we ran it. Before that we had been running those things that would go across and produce a high pile of paper on the other side.

MAN: Right. What did you use the computer for? Or what could it do?

VASULKA: This is what was interesting. We bought the computer mostly to control video because it was so unpredictable. These oscillators were flying all over the place; no frequency would stay put. And so we said, "A computer, that is the way we will control it." And after Jeffrey had been through it all, we could control it, but everything was so predictable and so dull we were dying. We said, (laughter) "We'll buy a two(?)..." And it was absolutely controllable, predictable. (more laughter) And Jeffrey fixed that. He wired those cables to tell the output to go back into the input. (laughter) And it created these patterns that were guaranteed never to repeat. They were random number generators. Walter was also printing also random number generators. He did everything to get away from this orderly thing called computer. But Don did the first thing. He made us (WHAT WAS THE TOOL CALLED?) the horizontal and the vertical division of the raster.

MAN: Don MacArthur did this?

VASULKA: Yeah. And then Jeffrey came in. For the rest of his time with us, he was going to win over Don MacArthur. He was gonna squeeze this guy out of our system. He was going to somehow do the design so well that you would have to throw out this whole Don thing. And it ended with him having a tremendous respect for him, because mathematically, what Don did was so sound. So we called our device the MacArthur-Shire synthesizer, because we could't get away from MacArthur. He was that important. A funny thing was that genlock was the problem, the phase lock loop. There was a difference between the computer and video. The video people screamed for years and years, because computer companies couldn't care less about us. Going in between wasn't jibing; it was always dropping and throwing these glitches and everything. Jeffrey looked at it and couldn't figure it out. So two student assistants came from the engineering department. Jeffrey immediately threw this at them. "Make a phase lock— genlock (CHECK) system." And they gave up. When they gave up, Jeffrey realized that this wasn't easy. He sat down and made it. You wouldn't believe it. It was just like the clock that runs the world; it could be the atomic clock. It was a masterpiece. This was the end of our stay in Buffalo. And Jeffrey was hired in California to build a phase lock loop. They told him, "Look, there is a big problem between computers and video. We don't know what to do about it." Jeffrey said, "I know." And they said, "Yes. Just take your time, young man. This is your assignment." Jeffrey came in the next day with the design. They said, "This is very good. It's very promising. Now, work it out." And for eighteen

months, (laughter) they held onto Jeffrey and gave him this fantastic salary. Until they believed that it was a sound design.

BODE: Can you talk about the move to New Mexico, and what precipitated that?

VASULKA: It was in '80. The thing is, we never wanted to go to Buffalo, and we never wanted to join academia. And then, against his will, Woody was hired. It was tempting. There was very little teaching. It wasn't a very good salary, about seventeen-thousand when he began. But it was an easy life, and everything was cheap in Buffalo then. In the heart of hearts, we knew that Buffalo was not our place. We had been misplaced there. We did have a great faculty, good communication, creative associates. Buffalo was a wonderful place. One day I remember the three of us working, Woody, Jerry and I, and Jerry says, in his funny New England accent, "Well, now we have to start thinking about tenure." And Woody said, "Ten years?! I'm not gonna be in this place for ten years!" He completely misunderstood. I said, "Woody, Woody, he's not saying 'ten years.'" "I don't know what he's saying, I just am not gonna be in Buffalo for ten years!" (they laugh) So sure enough, against Woody's will, he got the tenure, within a year. Then there was nothing to do but to leave. He had gotten the Guggenheim, so we could physically get out of there. And we didn't close any doors. Just like with New York, you know? We didn't keep our loft, but we made arrangements so that we could come back. The position was kept open, because Jerry wanted to fill in with other people, so that worked. Then we always got these slips from the university, "Your salary has increased to twenty-five

thousand." And they kept coming, those slips, and it was thirty-two thousand. I went to the bank, because we wanted to build a house. I said, "Oh, my husband has a decent salary. Here, this is his latest raise." (laughs) And they gave a mortgage.

BODE: This is actually jumping back, because I jumped forward through the Buffalo years very quickly. (Vasulka: Yeah) When you and were Woody in Buffalo, Hollis Frampton and Paul Sharits.

VASULKA: Tony Conrad was there very early too.

BODE: Was Brian Henderson there?

VASULKA: Yeah.

BODE: And that was the department, wasn't it?

VASULKA: Documentary filmmaker James Blue was there also.

BODE: Tell us about the interaction. That's a pretty remarkable faculty to bring together

VASULKA: It was very remarkable. And in the beginning, there was an incredible affinity among the professors. Brian was sort of always on the outer loop, but it didn't

matter. He was the youngest, and a little scared of the rest of us. But the rest of us were having the same issues and interested in the same matters. We were the underdogs, because we were video. Then as soon as we turned computers, Hollis got all perked up. He was not a courageous man, you know? He feared it a little bit, both the physicality and the mentality of computer. He was also concerned that his colleagues would think of him as a traitor for the film and photography, if he went over. So he used us to tiptoe into the computer realm. And as you know, he became very dedicated.

BODE: Yeah, and then he built a buffer, the Gollum Machine, (Vasulka: That's right) as he called it.

VASULKA: He even got into Harvard. The communication became very direct and practical with Hollis. We were sort of seducing him into this digital realm. With Sharits, we had so much more in common, because we were also doing a lot of flicker. Like that little flicker I showed yesterday, with the circle. We did that after we came to Buffalo, but before we saw any of Paul's work. And when we saw his work, we couldn't believe it; when he saw our work, he couldn't believe it, the kinship, the relationship we had. We did try to collaborate on some kind of a solid color(? CHECK) machine with Paul. It's now in Santa Fe.

BODE: What sort of thing was it?

VASULKA: It's an RGB machine. It has strobes in it. You could probably describe it better. Did you ever see it? It would strobe onto film?

MAN: Like a computer control program that you could transfer to film?

VASULKA: Yeah. You could control how much red, how much green, how much blue. In sixteen steps.

MAN: So it'd be a way for Paul to computerize his structures that he was doing in film.

VASULKA: Yeah. But at that time, he wasn't interested in that anymore. He was interested in other things, in painting. But it didn't matter, it was a really good thing for us to do anyway.

MAN: When you and Woody were in New York being involved with video were other filmmakers in that community too. Was Hollis in New York?

VASULKA: We had never heard of Hollis.

MAN: I think he was at Hunter College then. And Paul was in Antioch with Tony. I'm wondering about Jonas Mekas and the New American Cinema people (Vasulka: Jonas, we knew.) because in a sense, that's what Hollis and Tony and Paul were part of.

VASULKA: Yeah, we had met Kubelka early, in '67, through Alfonse(?), again. Jonas, we knew because he kept coming to the Kitchen and writing bad reviews. Really vitriolic reviews about how stupid all the video was.

MAN: Is that right? Because his reviews of film were to be totally in love with the filmmakers (Vasulka: Yeah) and their courageous, heroic visions.

VASULKA: Yeah. He was very cranky. Actually, the only people he didn't give bad reviews were Woody and I; he gave us moderate reviews. He didn't somehow dare to really throw it out. There was a point, when I saw him walking up the steps to come into the Kitchen, that I thought: I should tell Jonas to go home. I mean, these are kids, people who are showing maybe for the first time; they don't need this, to be touted in his diary in Village Voice as being totally incompetent. He was angry that video always had sound. He said, "In film, we didn't have sound. We thoroughly investigated the material of film before we ever dreamed about adding sound to it. And these hippies are superficial so-called video artists" He was the one to complain that film was film, but video was art; and that video artists called themselves video artists, and film, filmmakers. He didn't understand that it had nothing to do with any of us. I mean, video people didn't come out and say I'm a video maker, I don't know why. He blamed us. I mean, he was a cranky old man. I like it that he's now a full-time video person; I love it. He doesn't part from his camcorder.

MAN: Mm-hm. So you had experienced that when you were in New York. And in Buffalo, you were again with that same group. Was there some of that kind of attitude among them about video?

VASULKA: No, not as far as I was concerned. There was even a period when we thought we would join the Kitchen and the Millennium. We were talking to Howard Gutenplan(? CHECK) about it, before he found his wonderful place The Millennium.

MAN: But Ken Jacobs says that he started the Millennium.

VASULKA: Ken Jacobs did, but Howard was running it. We were talking to Howard about it because he didn't have any money to run it, and the Kitchen was quite successful, and that maybe we should join forces. So there was that kind of a kinship and friendship between the two places. And through Millennium, we knew quite a few filmmakers. Stan Brackage had come to the Kitchen. We were always really interested in film. We had met Andy Warhol but that group had no interest in us. None. Zero. There was just no way they were going to sit down and watch video. It was considered a kind of a punishment that no filmmaker would take. Even though Woody was a filmmaker, and because I came out of music, it never bothered us. We were not any kind of missionaries for video. I mean, we couldn't care less if everybody hated video. But we were just so bemused by this kind of attitude. Now I realize it was incredible arrogance on their part. And that's

just what it was. Not Tony Conrad though, because he was already more involved in music than film and has always been.

MAN: Yeah, mathematics, systems. And then when you were in Buffalo, do you remember hearing Jerry O'Grady being called Ghengis O'Grady. Did you ever hear that term?

VASULKA: No.

MAN: Ken Jacobs credited himself with naming Jerry that. That was the Binghamton name for Jerry because he sort of took over everything. He had educational communications at the university, and then he had media study, and then he had his hands in a lot of other projects.

VASULKA: Yeah, he did.

MAN: And he brought lots of people to Buffalo, right? (Vasulka: Yeah) So in some ways, you got to experience a different version of the Kitchen, in the sense of people coming through constantly.

VASULKA: It was sensational. We met basically everybody. And, you know, they usually would end up in our place, and we would have these deep talks. It was very good.

I remember there was a conference in Buffalo. It was a round table, like maybe five or six people on each table, making up a room of twenty, twenty-five, thirty people. And I remember Ken Jacobs at one point jumping up on the table.

MAN: Oh, I heard about that second or third hand. (Vasulka: Laughs) I wanna hear what you have to say.

VASULKA: No, that's just how I met Ken Jacobs. He jumped up on the table, he stomped on it, up and down. He called one guy a bloody fag—which he was. I mean, he was homosexual. And in '73, '74, that wasn't ok. So that was pretty tough, to just blurt that out.

MAN: What was the gist? Why did Ken do that?

VASULKA: I think he wanted to be avant garde. I don't remember what was the reason, but people did things like that then, remember?

MAN: That was with art, with Jerry and various administrators, university types?

VASULKA: Yeah. Fundraisers too.

MAN: The story was always characterized to me as Ken finally blowing up about art administrators, (Vasulka: Yeah) who actually destroyed what art was about.

VASULKA: That's right.

MAN: And that it was this thing of lashing out and saying that they might be trying to administrate all this art, but that they were actually destroying it.

VASULKA: Yeah. I remember it. There were people from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Ford Foundation, all these people.

MAN: Anyway, there were film people, video people, and then there were music people also in Buffalo, right? There was the Creative Associates. Was that what it was called?

VASULKA: Yeah. But we never managed to get together with them. I mean, we talked to Reeger(?) and Hiller(?) several times. Hiller was in the music department and was very much in favor of it, but...

MAN: Hiller was the one that taught Cage the computer?

VASULKA: Yeah, and Reeger and Hiller did that harpsichord piece. HP Harpsichord(?) CHECK). Yeah. And Morton Feldman was there, but he wasn't interested in electronic arts. But there was definitely an interest; it just never happened. They were in another

location on campus, and it couldn't be done. So we started just buying audio synthesizer ourselves. And this is where you guys at Alfred came in.

MAN: Yeah, we were talking yesterday about how difficult it was to connect the engineers and the music program.

VASULKA: Yeah.

MAN: So in 1980, you and Woody moved to New Mexico. Why Santa Fe?

VASULKA: Woody opened the letter from Guggenheim. And you know, the Guggenheim doesn't say, "Congratulations, you have gotten our fellowship." They say, "You may be considered. Please name the money you want." That's their letter of acceptance, very cool. And since I already had gotten one, I knew what it meant. And I said, "Woody, you got the fellowship! Let's get out of here." (Man: Laughs) And then the next sentence I said was something about "Santa Fe." So we went to Santa Fe to see if it was interesting, and it was. Santa Fe sounded so good like: Sha-la-la. (they laugh)

MAN: For a European ear, particularly. (laughter)

MAN: Were you also on a board selected by the president for something one time?

VASULKA: No. What president?

MAN: While you were still in Buffalo, there was a conference there called Nuts and Bolts. (Vasulka: Yeah)

MAN: Walter Gonyevsky(?) put together.

MAN: Were you involved in that?

VASULKA: Oh, very much.

BODE: That's where my father met you guys, because he came to that and I introduced you to him.

VASULKA: Yeah. That was the beginning of meeting a lot of good people.

BODE: I was there for the conference. I was back in Binghamton and involved with the Experimental Television Center. Did you continue to have some contact and some with my father Harald.

VASULKA: Harald and Peer, these are names of kings from the tenth century. (laughter) Harald had a presentation there. And he could have shown the ring module or the

vocoder. But I think he gave a general lecture. That was a very impressive lecture he gave. He had a lot to say about his past and what he had designed. I remember we were so grateful for Guyevsky, to have discovered this guy. I found him there, right on the doorstep. Then we visited him and he visited us and back and forth. He sort of witnessed this whole vocoder coming into being, slowly, you know. He would be adding features, and we would listen to any new feature coming in. Well, it was very interesting. And I took a video tape recorder and my violin out there. The vocoder in sound and image.

BODE: It seemed like a real natural, easy thing, that we went over to your place too.

VASULKA: Yeah, definitely.

MAN: I wanted to ask you about the TV shows you made, because that was my first introduction to your work. Was it WNET?

VASULKA: No. It was WNED Buffalo (CHECK ON THIS) in '78, '79. We got a grant that Jerry did for us. We sent in a big grant in Toniska(?) CHECK to make six programs. We wrote out what they would be about with the station manager at Channel 17 in Buffalo. And they were going to get a time base corrector and a camera out of it, plus five-thousand dollars, which they took gleefully. That was our first PortaPak, the one that was bought for the station, and we got to use it. You know, sixteen-hundred(?) CHECK single. We started editing. We got a wonderful editor, a very ambitious young kid. It took

time. They were totally livid that we were using studio time, taking advantage of the station. And the station manager sent his lackey down to tell us that the station would be perfectly happy with two half-hours. We said, "No way. We're gonna make six." It was the same as every Public Television station; there was this great downstairs, where the engineers were and the production unit. They were upbeat and gung-ho and interested in experimenting. Then there was always this dreadful upstairs, where they had no imagination and couldn't imagine how the public could view this kind of terrible experimental stuff. And sure enough, they aired the programs at midnight.

MAN: Yeah, I saw them. I was home visiting, and there was a horror movie that was ending, and then in the next beat, up came Woody and Steina, (they laugh) talking about image processing.

VASULKA: I think we have a TV Guide to prove that. (they laugh) It was called *Vasulka Video*.

MAN: I showed the *Vasulka Video* tapes in class. Those are pretty wonderful tapes. They're informational and almost like a conference presentation about work, very good. So was there any kind of obligation that the station had to play them?

VASULKA: No, not really. They did, because we had made them, but I don't really think they had any requirement to do that.

MAN: Let's jump forward a little bit to Santa Fe. How did your involvement change, being in Santa Fe? You ended up then traveling to more. You weren't teaching or connected to one institution. You were suddenly connected to many of them.

VASULKA: Yeah. We just did very well with grants for a long time in the beginning, culminating with going to Japan. We could do our own work and everything changes. Our image changed. I went there and looked out at nature and said, "I cannot do this." You know, this is cliché, this is nature, this is landscape. But then I tumbled headlong into it and have done a lot of work like that since. We have little indoor space, but so does everybody else. It's hard to get large indoor spaces but we have always had big lots. And so it's still hurting; I mean, we're still thinking of how to get a hangar or some kind of a building to work in. We rent one now, outside our home. But the work changes according to the physical space you have available. We didn't know that, really, but it did. So Woody went really headlong into computers, because it takes very little space. And I've done some traveling. Now it's very tough, because there is no grant money, so we have to live off our wits. You don't really want to go the museum (?) route, if you can help it, because I think it's just too time consuming. But it certainly would be nice to get that kind of money, be able to sell a single installation for between hundred-and-fifty and two-hundred-fifty-thousand. It's the other way of going, you know? We are cheap people with very little money. We buy really cheap, and live in luxury, by having way overrated equipment that we got for almost nothing. Nam June and Gary (Hill) went the other way; they can afford to have very high class equipment, because they have a lot of

money. And it's just two different lifestyles. I'm so used to living out of the seat of my pants, not knowing if I'm going to have money in the bank or if I'm going to owe a tremendous amount. I'm so used to it now that it doesn't touch me. I don't care.

MAN: And the traveling now is a big part of what you do, right?

VASULKA: Yeah, because that's where the money is. There's no money in New Mexico.

MAN: You were saying before that the spaces where you lived changed your work. Suddenly, you live in a bigger kind of space. Do you think that that's true?

VASULKA: Well, it's outer footage versus indoor footage. That's one tremendous change. If you know our tapes, before and after, you know there was a change.

MAN: I'm not even sure what the question, but the experiences I've had being in Europe really has totally changed my sense of what's possible, and how I feel about being here. You were in Europe quite a bit to see this sort of overview or larger kind of frame. It seems that you were able to pull from this, because of contacts.

VASULKA: Yeah, but Europe has its drawbacks. I would rather live here, because it's much easier being in video. Just access to technology, access to tools alone. Here, it takes

a call to an eight-hundred number, and whatever you need is on your doorstep, maybe the next morning. There is no such thing in Europe. I mean, if you call up somebody at an eight-hundred number and you say, "I need a time base corrector," they say, "We don't have it." And you say, "Where can I get it?" "I don't know." "Could you give us any other eight-hundred numbers?" "No."

MAN: I can't imagine that.

VASULKA: If you go there as a guest, it is fabulous. (Man: Right) But if you are going to live there, you have to break through all these barriers. It's not the same collaborative idea. "Man, I've got a new time base corrector. It's cheap, and it's there, and I'll give you the number. And ask for Peter." You know? (inaudible; they laugh) "Tell him I sent you." No way.

MAN: How much time is left on the tape?

VASULKA: Yeah, for God's sake!